

Local Green Spaces for Histon & Impington – Policy Framework and Local Context

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This paper summarises the National and District policy frameworks and local social context for the designation of Local Green Spaces in the Histon & Impington Neighbourhood Plan. Appendix III of the plan summarises the process followed.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Natural Environment White Paper ([The Natural Choice](#): securing the value of nature 2011) highlighted “the importance of green spaces to the health and happiness of local communities”. The Natural England document “Nature Nearby - Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance” (NE265, produced 2011, archived 2014 - [Nature Nearby](#) and [angst](#)) was recently reinforced by their report on the link between Nature and mental health care ([Nature and mental health news](#) and [Nature and mental health review](#)). Even during the course of the Neighbourhood Plan preparation, evidence for the importance of green spaces for health and wellbeing has continued to pile up.

Green spaces, particularly natural green spaces, located close to local people provide a range of social, environmental and economic benefits, including –

- improved mental and physical health
- increased social activity
- increased physical activity
- reduced crime
- improvements to children’s learning
- increased voluntary action
- improved community cohesion and sense of belonging
- potential for local food growing
- more attractive places to live, work, play, visit and invest
- enhanced opportunities for wildlife habitats and wildlife corridors
- climate change adaptation for example by flood alleviation

The White Paper recommended that, because of “*the importance of green spaces to the health and happiness of local communities*” a new Green Areas designation be introduced that would give local people an opportunity to protect green spaces that have significant importance to their local communities. That recommendation was incorporated into the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) of 2012. The NPPF addressed in paragraph 73 the importance that access to open space has to the health and wellbeing of a community and established the new designation of Local Green Spaces. This was retained in the new NPPF

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>,

published in July 2018, paragraphs 98-101 of which say:

98. Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.

99. The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them. Designating land as Local Green Space should be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other

essential services. Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or updated, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period.

100. The Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green space is:

- a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*
- b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and*
- c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.*

101. Policies for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with those for Green Belts.

Furthermore, the new NPPF (paras 170-177) includes a strong section on “*Conserving and enhancing the natural environment*”. Paragraph 170 lists ways in which “*Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment*”. Para 174 emphasises the importance of habitat conservation and connectivity between habitats:

“174. To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

- a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity⁵⁶; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation⁵⁷; and*
- b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.”*

Local Green Spaces can be designated within village boundaries or in the Green Belt. The NPPF lists the purposes of the Green Belt and also says (para 141): “*Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.*”

Additional, national information about the benefits of green spaces and the means of securing them can be found in the document, “*Neighbourhood Planning Local Green Spaces*” prepared for the government-funded My Community mycommunity.org.uk, and briefings by the Open Spaces Society (www.oss.org.uk) on [Neighbourhood Planning OSS](#), [LGS designation OSS](#) and [Community assets OSS](#).

2. SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT FRAMEWORK

In the Local Plan for South Cambridgeshire, adopted in 2018, the sections on “*Green Belt and Recreation Uses*” and “*Protecting Village Character*” (paras 6.37-6.42) say the following about Green Belt recreation and the categories of Local Green Space (LGS), Protected Village Amenity Area (PVAA) and Important Countryside Frontage (ICF):

Green Belt and Recreation Uses

6.37 The Cambridge Green Belt plays an important role in providing opportunities for access to the countryside for local people. This is recognised in the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy.

6.38 The NPPF (2012) guidance on Green Belt at paragraph 81 requires local planning authorities to plan positively to enhance beneficial use of the Green Belt including through providing opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation. At paragraph 89 the NPPF (2012) allows for the provision of new buildings to provide appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation that preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with Green Belt purposes. With the growth proposed in the extensions around the City in the Cambridge Green Belt it is likely that land will become more intensively used, which could result in pressure for sport and recreational facilities being relocated to, or specifically developed on Green Belt land. It is important this is done in a way which protects the overall rural character of the Green Belt rather than creating a character more associated with the urban environment.

Protecting Village Character

6.39 The character of villages is made up of a blend of buildings and open spaces. Given the pressure for development in the district, the remaining open land in and on the edge of villages is threatened. Some undeveloped land can be built on without harm to the character of the village and can contribute to the full and effective use of land in accordance with national policy, but others are important to maintain the village character and should not be developed. Some of these open spaces are particularly valued and cherished by the local community.

Policy NH/10: Recreation in the Green Belt

Proposals for new buildings to provide appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation will be permitted where they will not (either individually or cumulatively) harm the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within it.

Policy NH/11: Protected Village Amenity Areas

Protected Village Amenity Areas are identified on the Policies Map where development will not be permitted within or adjacent to these areas if it would have an adverse impact on the character, amenity, tranquillity or function of the village.

6.40 Protected Village Amenity Areas (PVAAs) have been designated on sites within village frameworks in order to safeguard those areas of undeveloped land within villages which are important to retain. Some of the PVAAs may have important functions for the village such as allotments, recreation grounds and playing fields whilst others have an important amenity role in providing a setting for buildings or offer tranquil areas where there is minimum activity. Not all PVAAs have public access as some undeveloped areas which are important may be private gardens. They also vary from those which are very open to visual penetration to those which may be enclosed or semi-enclosed.

6.41 The NPPF has created a designation called Local Green Space (LGS), which is for green areas of particular importance to local communities which once designated can prevent new development other than in very special circumstances. Local communities and parish councils in the district have helped the Council to identify the sites that are demonstrably special to their local community. A LGS must hold a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife. The green area must be in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves. It must be local in character and not be an extensive tract of land. These sites can protect land outside of a development framework. A list of Local Green Space is provided in Appendix C.

Policy NH/12: Local Green Space

Local Green Space identified on the Policies Map will be protected from development that would adversely impact on the character and particular local significance placed on such green areas which

make them valued by their local community. Inappropriate development, as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework, would not be approved except in very special circumstances and in discussion with the local community.

Policy NH/13: Important Countryside Frontage

1. Important Countryside Frontages are defined where land with a strong countryside character either:

a. Penetrates or sweeps into the built-up area providing a significant connection between the street scene and the surrounding rural area; or

b. Provides an important rural break between two nearby but detached parts of a development framework.

2. Planning permission for development will be refused if it would compromise these purposes.

6.42 In many places land with a strong countryside character penetrates or sweeps into South Cambridgeshire's villages or separates two parts of the built-up area. Such land enhances the setting, character and appearance of the village by retaining the sense of connection between the village and its rural origins and surroundings. The frontage where this interface particularly occurs is identified to indicate that the frontage and the open countryside beyond should be kept open and free from development. In most cases it is land which adjoins the village built-up area but in some cases it separates two parts of the village and the open intervening land therefore assumes an importance for the character of the village as a whole.

The essential differences between PVAA and LGS status are (i) that PVAA can only be accorded to sites within the boundaries of the village itself, whereas an LGS site can be outside the village in the Green Belt; and (ii) LGS status is stricter in excluding development where PVAA status is more flexible in permitting development that is not adjudged to be too detrimental to the values of the site.

Sites proposed for LGS status should be supported by a persuasive dossier of information responding to the criteria and endorsed by community members.

3. CONTEXT FOR HISTON & IMPINGTON DESIGNATION OF LOCAL GREEN SPACES

Policy SC/7 of the adopted Local Plan sets out the *minimum standards* for the amount of open space (in hectares per 1000 people) that should be available for: (i) outdoor sport, (ii) allotments and community orchards, (iii) open space for formal children's play, (iv) open space for informal children's play, and (v) open space for general recreation. Histon & Impington has the largest population of all the villages in South Cambridgeshire, which may increase the challenge of meeting these standards. Nevertheless, it is of deep concern that an assessment by the District Council ([SCambs open space study](#)) found that of the 104 villages H&I has the largest shortfall in publicly available space both for outdoor sports and for formal and informal children's play area. On the positive side, H&I is one of only 8 villages to have a community orchard (of 1.1 ha) and its provision of orchards + allotments exceeds the minimum by 8.05 ha (second only to Cottenham). Data for the general recreation spaces were not readily available in the report, but there is strong local demand for more inter-connected green spaces from H&I's many walkers, runners, dog-walkers, cyclists, stressed-out students, young people, retired people, naturalists and others seeking the benefits listed in the first section of this paper!

Category of open space	Minimum standard in hectares per 1000 people	H&I area in hectares	Surplus/deficit in ha relative to minimum standard	Ranking in terms of hectares of surplus/deficit
Outdoor sport space	1.6 ha	6.27	-7.19	104/104 i.e. biggest deficit in hectares
Allotment	Combined 0.4ha	10.31	+ 8.05 (i.e. 6.95 of allotments plus further 1.1ha of orchard)	2/104 (second to Cottenham)
Community orchards		1.1		3/8 (96 have no orchard at all)
Formal and informal play area for children	0.4 ha formal plus 0.4 ha informal	1.3	-5.43	104/104 i.e. biggest deficit in hectares
Other informal open space	0.4 ha	No data	No data	No data

Table based on data in the South Cambridgeshire Recreation and Open Space study, 2013

In this context it is especially important to protect the few remaining open spaces within the village boundary and to increase the protection of the most valuable open green spaces around the village. The Neighbourhood Plan provides a mechanism for doing that by establishing new Local Green Spaces. Para 76 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that LGS's "should only be designated when a [local or neighbourhood] plan is prepared or reviewed, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period". The H&I Neighbourhood Plan covers the period 2018-2031, now is the time for LGS designation!

The South Cambs draft Local Plan includes no LGS sites in H&I but does include several PVAA's, as listed in the Neighbourhood Plan. In addition, Abbey Farm is designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument in the South Cambs Local Plan.

4. COMPILATION OF DOSSIERS FOR CANDIDATE LGS SITES

For each site proposed to be designated as LGS it is necessary to compile a dossier of supporting information. To facilitate this, a template was created for summarising the case for each LGS and referring to the supporting evidence, such as maps, photographs, reports, letters from community groups etc. The template responds to the official LGS criteria described in this document. Note that the national and district policies list the criteria as **examples**, not as exhaustive lists of possible reasons why a green space may be significant to the local community. In the template for proposed H&I Local Green Spaces we:

- Merged "beauty" and "tranquillity" into a single section, as there may be much overlap in the evidence;
- Added a section on other ecosystem services, as these are of great local significance for some sites. However, Carbon sequestration has not been included as an ecosystem service, as it is not especially local in nature.
- Added a section on connectivity between sites, because this is very important for long-term sustainability of "wildlife richness" (which is one of the criteria). As is well known, isolated fragments of habitat decline steadily in species diversity and abundance. Furthermore, there can be great synergies between wildlife-related values and recreational values e.g. walks between a string of green spaces connected by vegetated paths.

Based on the dossiers, a summary spreadsheet, addressing the specific criteria of the National and Local Plan framework was prepared and is included with the submitted Neighbourhood Plan.